BHĀSA AS DRAMATIST

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धावकापरनामायं भासो भासयते जगत्।
तत्वैरिवादिपुरुषः चतुर्विंशतिरूपकैः ॥

TRADITION THUS refers to Bhāsa as having an *alias* as Dhāvaka and that he wrote 24 dramas, among which the *Svapnavāsavadatta* and *Kiranāvali* stand out as the most prominent. It is a pity only 13 from among them are published from Trivandrum and though the famous śloka :

कपाले मार्जारः पय इति करान् लेढि शशिनः
तरुच्छिद्रप्रोतान् बिसमिति करा संकलयति ।
रतान्ते तल्पस्थान्हरति वनिताप्यंशुकमिति
प्रभा मत्तश्चन्द्रो जगदिदमहो विपलवयति ॥

may not be found in these 13, there is every hope that it may be found in the other 11 if and when they may be published. This verse is ascribed to him in सूक्तिमुक्तावलि, शार्ङ्गधरपद्धति, सुभाषितावलि and सुभाषितरत्न भाण्डागार, but in the recently published सुभाषितरत्नकोश (edited by Professors Ingalls and Kosambi from Harvard Oriental Series), it is attributed to Rājaśekhara, complicating the matter further. Bhāsa's Prakrit has also been studied by Wilhelm Printz (Frankfurt 1921) and also by Dr. Sukthankar and they agree in declaring that it is prior to Kālidāsa. The fact that they are the most vigorous and dramatic among the existing dramas has been acknowledged by Drs. Winternitz, Keith and many others. Later dramatists like Bhavabhūti or Murāri insert ślokas in season and out of season while Bhāsa uses them but sparingly. Even Kālidāsa sometimes forgets himself, particularly when using his favourites, आर्या or मन्दाक्रान्ता, while Bhāsa uses only 3 Āryās ; in *Svapna,* he has only 57 verses ; out of about 1092 verses, 436 are the small Anuṣṭubh. Bigger metres with involved words are put appropriately into the mouths of Balarāma and are not more than half a dozen. This could be contrasted with the matter and manner of later dramatists like Viśākhadatta, Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇa. The latter's battle narration particularly in the fourth act of *Veṇīsamhāra* where Sundaraka's boaring narration could favourably be contrasted with any brief and suggestive dialogue in Bhāsa.

That the language was living at the time of Bhāsa could easily be shown by his use of च, वा, and किल. The plaintive appeal in *Pañcharātra* I 37. ये दुर्बलाश्च कृपणाश्च निराश्रयाश्च स्वत्तश्च शर्म मृगयन्ति consequent on the use of च is noteworthy. In another context in the *Abhiṣeka* III p. 345 (Deodhar),

Vibhīṣaṇa's remark अधमश्च orders out Rāvaṇa's guess that he wants to hide something and orders him to speak it out—चशब्देनावगतमन्यदप्यस्तीति and Vibhīṣaṇa is forced ro confess बलवद्विग्रहः and Rāvaṇa insults him even to the extent of calling him a fifth columnist. Similar is the use of किल—which nowadays simply means इत्यैतिह्य 'so goes the tale in the Purāṇas.' Lakṣmaṇa remarks in *Pratimā* I. 23.

यत्कृते महति क्लेशे राज्ये मे न मनोरथः ।
वर्षाणि किल वस्तव्यं चतुर्दश वनेत्वया ॥

He means to say: "I am not so much bothered about the loss of the kingdom as it involves a lot of worry: You have to live in the forest for no less than 14 years—that is my real headache!"

I agree with Jayaswal and Dhruva in assigning this dramatist to the end of the 2nd century B.C. but on other grounds. I regard the *Bāla-carita* as a historical drama identical with the *Kamsavadha* referred to by Patañjali in III. 2. as प्रत्यक्षं कंसं घातयन्ति—as murdering Kamsa before our vary eyes. Ramakrishnakavi testifies to the fact that this alternative title is found in some manuscripts as also गदायुद्ध for ऊरुभंग, कर्णभार or कुण्डलाहरण, अभिषेक as रामाभिषेक, प्रतिमा or प्रतिमादशरथ etc. This drama, as I am tempted to believe, was written with the express purpose of instigating his patron Puṣyamitra to murder his master Bṛhadratha in an army *meelee*, exactly answering to the *Dhanurmaha* in the *Bālacharita*. The adjective अनुगतार्थ-नामधेय at the end of Act IV in the drama qualifying उग्रसेन in the invitation brought by Akrūra can be explained allegorically as indirectly referring to Puṣyamitra alone, Ugrasena being actually imprisoned by his son. It is also interesting to note how the *Amarakośa* Kṣatriyavarga explaining मण्डलेश्वरा (p. 76, Poona Oriental Series) quotes शूद्रकस्त्वग्निमित्रो वा हालःस्याच्छालि-वाहनः Śūdraka is here equated with Agnimitra. This Śūdraka must have been patronised by Agnimitra's father along with Bhāsa and added a political episode to the 4 acts of the *Daridrachārudatta*, expanding it into 10 acts, making it a प्रकरण could it be that the dramatist Śūdraka and Puṣyamitra who are both द्विजमुख्य were identical, enabling us to correct the sentence into शूद्रकः पुष्यमित्रो वा? It's only on this supposition that we can aqueeze some meaning from the mysterious śloka in the प्रस्तावना of मृच्छकटिका-ऋग्वेदं सामवेदं etc. शूद्रकोऽग्निं प्रविष्टः could be compared with अविमारक entering into fire in Bhāsa's drama, only to be embraced by Agni as a friend (or the father in Bhāsa). Avimāraka, Udayana and some others are gifted with the knowledge of taming elephants—हस्तिशिक्षा. Puṣyamitra, we know from history, performed the Aśvamedha and saw his son ruling

with royal powers at Vidiśa (प्रथित विदिशालक्षणां राजधानींराजानं वीक्ष्य पुत्रं परमसमुदयेन अश्वमेधेन चेष्ट्वा). The society depicted in Bhāsa, Vātsyāyana's *Kāmasūtra*, the Buddhist Epic *Lalita Vistara* and some Buddhist Jātakas is, it may be confidently asserted is post-Aśokan (as admirably shown by H. C. Chakaldar in *Studies in Vātsyāyana*). Bhāsa's heroes are Nāgarakas as described by Vātsyāyana. Chārudatta is *Bhuktavibhavaḥ* who has enjoyed life fully; Mahāsena's wife is षोडशान्तःपुरज्येष्ठा. The गणिका in चारुदत्त is proficient in fine arts. One example of dramatic skill may now be cited. The heroes are all *Madhyamas*, strong and sturdy using their arms only as weapons—द्वावेव दोर्भ्यां समरे प्रवृत्तौ हलायुधश्चैव वृकोदरश्च. Ghatotkacha, inheriting this title from his father Bhimasena, the मध्यम among the sons of Kunti appears twice, first in the मध्यमव्यायोग (where both father and son fight with each other, the latter not knowing that it is his father) and later in दूतघटोत्कच where he exhibits rare skill:

दष्टोष्ठो मुष्टिमुद्यम्य तिष्ठत्येष घटोत्कचः ।
उत्तिष्ठतु पुमान्कश्चिद्गन्तुमिच्छेद्यमालयम् ॥

Here is an entirly new episode not found in the Epic. Sri Krishna has sent a message through this martial envoy proposing that hostilities should cease at least at this stage when Abhimanyu is dead. Dhrtarāstra, the grand father has just heard about Arjuna's vow to kill Jayadratha before next sunset. He has heard Dusśala's loud wailings and refuses to pronounce a blessing when his sons Duryodhana, Duśśāsana and their evil prompters Karṇa and Śakuni prostrate before him. When asked why he is silent, he replies, एका कुलेऽस्मिन् बहुपुत्रनाथे लब्धा सुता पुत्रशताद्विशीष्टा, सा वै सुतानां भवतां प्रमादाद्वैधव्यमश्लाघ्यमवाप्स्यतीति॥ that his dearest daughter should suffer for the sins of his sons! Ghatotkacha enters at this stage and Duryodhana at first refuses to hear Sri Krishna's message on the plea that he was not a crowned king like himself. The envoy urges that He is the king of all kings, that He is the Supreme Lord, not only of this world, but of the three worlds. The grandfather intercedes and the envoy delivers the message of good brotherliness. Duryodhana feels insulted and he says that he would not retaliate as Ghatotkacha is only a boy but the latter suggests that he need not be treated like the boy Abhimanyu. They insult him as a Rākṣasa, but he says that he might have been born among them, but he or his kinsmen would not molest their brother's wife, nor would they burn up their brothers in a lachouse. This they cannot tolerate and rush towords the seeming boy who girds up his loins and is ready to dispatch all of them to yamaloka saying दष्टोष्ठो मुष्टिमुद्यम्य that biting his lips, he would dash them down with his tightly closed fists. The blind king pacifies the 'boy' who

departs after delivering Sri Krishna's message of सौभ्रात्र which is Bhāsa's unique message to a warridden world :

धर्मं समाचर कुरु स्वजनव्यपेक्षाम्
यत्कांक्षितं मनसि सर्वमिहानुतिष्ठ ।
जात्योऽपदेश इव पाण्डवरूपधारी
सूर्यांशुभि : सममुपैष्यति व : कृतान्त : ॥

the sun's rays would escort Yama in the guise of the Pāṇḍava Arjuna the next day.